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History of the town of Riverhead
Suffolk County, N.Y.

By Hon. George Miller.



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HISTORY OF THE TOWN OF RIVERHEAD, SUFFOLK COUNTY, N. Y.

Written by Hon. George Miller, and read by T. M. Griffing,
Esq., at the Centennial Celebration,
July 4, 1876.

The town of Riverhead embraces all that part of the town of Southold, as constituted by statute, bounded northerly by the Sound, easterly by the east line of the Albertson farm, so called, extending from the Sound to the bay, and chiefly belonging to the late Israel Fanning; southerly by Peconic Bay and Peconic River, and westerly by the town of Brookhaven. The original east line of that town extended from a pepperidge tree standing "at the head of a small brook that runneth into the creek called Panquacnussuck," (which is Wading River creek,) north to the Sound and south to the ocean. That tree stood nearly opposite the house late of Gabriel Mills, deceased, now of Robert H. Corbett, and has ever been regarded as the bound between the towns. The territory west of the said north line and east of the Wading River creek belonged to Brookhaven, but that town ceded it to Riverhead, on condition that the latter town should support a pauper that lived there.

The patent of the town of Southold was bounded on the south by a line running from the head of Red Creek to the head of the said brook at Wading River. It crosses Peconic River at Riverhead in the neighborhood of the present waste gate, and from thence

westward. It has always been a known line, and a landmark between the divisions of land lying north and south of it. The land on the south was granted by the Colonial Governor to Chief Justice Smith by a patent bounded on the west by the Brookhaven line; on the northeast by the Manor line to Red Creek; thence southeasterly by a line extending from Red Creek to the head of Seatuck. It is believed that the portion of this patent lying between the Manor line and Peconic River was joined to the town of Southold by the earliest legislative division of the towns, and that people of Southold purchased of Judge Smith the land north of Peconic River and allotted it.

There is nothing in the records of the town of Southold to show that the proprietors under the patent of that town ever made a recorded allotment of their lands now within the town of Riverhead. But most of the proprietors took the lands severally allotted to them without entering the same on record. It appears that in 1659 the proprietors granted to John Tooker and Joshua Horton the privilege of building a saw mill on Peconic River, with a little land. Tooker in 1711 conveyed 400 acres of land to John Parker, bounded east by Parker's land,

south by Peconic River, west by widow Cooper's land, and north by the Sound. Parker owned the land on the south side of the river. In 1726, by deed of gift, John Parker conveyed to Joseph Wickham and Abigail Wickham, his daughter, all his land north of Peconic River, to the said Joseph for life and then to his daughter and her heirs. Her husband died in 1749. His widow died in 1780, and her oldest son, Parker, inherited her estate, which was confiscated after the war and purchased by Gen. Floyd, who sold the property to Mr. Jagger.

In 1753 Thomas Fanning sold the hotel property, 130 acres, with the dam as far as the saw mill, to John Griffing, for £1,000. In 1775 John Griffing conveyed his land south of the highway, with the grist mill and his part of the stream, to Nathaniel Griffing, his son, for £500. John Griffing was a patriotic Whig and went to Connecticut with his family when the war came on, and died there in 1780, intestate, and all his estate descended to his eldest son, John, who occupied the property until he sold it to Benjamin Brewster about the beginning of this century. He, within ten years, conveyed it to Bartlett Griffing, the youngest son of John Griffing the elder, and he within a year conveyed it to his brother, William Griffing, in whose family it ever after remained until it was conveyed to John P. Terry, the present proprietor, in 1864. The main building of this hotel was erected by the Messrs Griffings in 1844.

The village of Riverhead for nearly 30 years after the Revolution remained stationary, with but four houses, viz.: The Griffing Hotel, Joseph Osborn's house, on Terry & Wells's corner, David Jagger's house, and the mill house,

built by William Albertson, the owner of the grist mill. David Horton lived in the Court house and kept the jail. Stephen Griffing occupied the place late of Dr. Thomas Osborn.

In 1815 Nathaniel Griffing, Jr., built the house now occupied by Mr. Miller, on premises his father had purchased 40 years before. The same year Hubbard and Wells Griffing built the sloop McDonough, the first vessel built in Riverhead after the war. They ran her until 1825 and then sold her and built the sloop Pacific. Afterwards Capt. James Horton bought the McDonough, rebuilt her and ran her many years and sold her. She is now in Connecticut and was seen in New York last summer in quite good condition.

Benjamin Brewster bought the grist mill of William Albertson and ran it some years after the war of 1812. During this time it was burnt. Mr. Brewster got his insurance and rebuilt the mill, setting it on an elbow of the dam, which he carried a considerable distance northeast from the former site. When he sold his hotel, about 1808, he built the house late of Hubbard Griffing, deceased, which he occupied until he sold the mill to Ezra Hallock. In 1824 the grist mill was overhauled, and greatly improved with new water wheels. In that summer the water was drawn off the mill pond, causing, as was supposed, considerable sickness and some deaths.

In 1825 the village had considerably advanced and increased. Moses C. Cleveland had set up a shoe shop, and Jedediah Conklin a blacksmith's shop, both of whom were active business men. There were three stores, kept by Elijah Terry, William Jagger and William Griffing, Jr. Since then business and population have greatly increased. There are now some 20 stores, three drug shops, four dentists, four butcher's shops, five physicians, six lawyers, five churches and a large Union School.

The Long Island House still occupies a part of the original hotel owned by the Griffings 128 years ago, and owned by some of the family nearly ever since until it was purchased by John P. Terry, the present landlord.

Henry L. Griffin owns a large hotel near the railroad, or part of the Griffing farm, built in 1862.

The Suffolk Hotel, kept by John Corwin, was built on a part of the same property in the year 1825, first as a dwelling, afterwards greatly enlarged, and kept as a hotel since 1834.

The large brick store on Bridge street was built in 1854 by David F. Vail. John Downs built his brick block on the corner of Main street and Griffing ave. in 1871-2. The Messrs. Hill built their three story double brick store on Main street in 1874.

Dr. Thomas Osborn was the first physician in the village and the only one for thirty years. He commenced practice very early in this century and died in 1849. Dr. Joseph Doane practiced in this village 12 years and died in 1847. Dr. — Conklin was the first physician in the town. He lived and practiced at Lower Aquogue.

Riverhead has two Engine Companies. The first, Red Bird, was organized in 1833. It has now two hand engines and 40 members; Gilbert H. Ketcham foreman. The second, Washington, was organized in 1862. It has one hand engine, and a new steamer purchased in 1875; members 36; Oliver A. Terry foreman.

The Riverhead Savings Bank was organized in 1872—Richard H. Benjamin then and still President, with twenty Trustees whose services are gratuitous. It has averaged more than one new depositor for every day since, has paid \$113,000 to its depositors, and has now invested over \$200,000. Its influence has been very beneficial.

An early individual enterprise was performed by the late Isaac Swezey, Sr., by which in 1848 he dug a canal over 80 rods long and moved his grist mill from the dam on Little River to the village at the verge of the Great River.

Charles Hallett has contributed much to the growth and material prosperity of the

village. In 1856 he started a planing mill, using to some extent both steam and water power, which finally passed into other hands. In 1866 he built a steam planing mill on the north side of the river, which did a large business—the first year to the amount of \$22,000, and in the years 1873 and 1874 the business amounted to \$125,000 a year, and his pay roll was \$32,000 in 1873 and \$34,000 in 1874. He has now rented out the steam mill, which is run by Weeks & Milard, we believe prosperously for the times.

In 1870 Mr. Hallett started a paper mill for making board paper of straw. In 1872 he started a flouring mill, which he has now fitted for making flour by the new process, and is running the mill with much success, commanding patronage, by the railroad, from Queens county. His paper mill has been much improved by new inventions, adapted to the pressure of the times, so as to make a very superior board that can be sold at a profit.

The village of Riverhead has received great benefit from the improvement of the channel of the river. Congress has made three appropriations, amounting in the aggregate to \$25,000, and the State has appropriated \$5,000, all of which has been carefully expended in deepening the channel with a steam excavator. The result has been not only very favorable to navigation, but it has caused the water to run off at low tide nearly a foot lower, while it very unexpectedly prevents as high a rise of water as formerly with an east wind, rendering great advantages to the mill stream and making the adjoining lots and gardens, cellars and wharves more comfortable and valuable. Further appropriations are necessary to make the work complete. It is believed that \$20,000 would effect all that could be desired.

At the close of the Revolution agriculture was at a low ebb as well as business of every other kind. The cultivated lands had been worked down and become poor, and the people were without fertilizers. Manuring with fish was then unknown and the people of this branch of the Island went to Coram and Middle Island with their horse carts to buy rye to live on. People were deeply in debt according to

their means of payment. As an illustration of this, it appears from the records that more than 100 writs were returnable to the Court of Common Pleas of this county during the first year after the war. Before or soon after the beginning of this century bunker fishing for manure was begun by the farmers. This soon improved their circumstances, enabled them to raise good crops, and produce manure from other sources so as to make their land permanently good, and the condition of the people very much improved. Buying fertilizers from abroad was not then practiced. Judge John Woodhull was the first man in the town to buy ashes for manure, and it enabled him to make hay superior to that of his neighbors. Fifty years ago he owned the only steel spring carriage in the town, and about that time it was thought quite an improvement for the hotel at Riverhead to have a sulky with woolen springs and thorough-braces.

The Long Island Railroad commenced running the last day of July, 1844. The passenger train run three times a week and so continued through the ensuing winter and probably longer. Fifty years ago we had the mail at Riverhead once a week by a one horse wagon, and if we went to New York by stage we must cross over to Quogue and reach the city by the mail stage towards night of the second day. After a few years we came to have a mail stage through on the middle country road. Passengers would start from Riverhead at noon, stay at Thomas Hallock's at the Branch the first night, and arrive at Brooklyn towards evening the next day. After some years we came to have two mails a week, but the change is very great now. We have the mail to and from New York twice a day, and three trains a day in the summer.

No part of the town of Riverhead has increased so much and so rapidly in agricultural wealth as Northville. That village and the whole extent of the north road to Wading River, prove that the early historians of the town misperceived the character of a large part of the lands in the town not then brought under cultivation. They are in fact valuable for that purpose and

have been much improved within a few years.

Wading River more than 50 years ago had a good deal of enterprise in the coasting business, and built some valuable vessels for that trade and launched them into the Sound. The railroad, which has done so much for the prosperity of other parts of the town, has rather tended to retard the growth of this place.

The village of Jamesport has come into being within the last half of our Centennial period. It is built on Miamogue Point. The wharf was built in 1833 and the hotel in 1836. It has grown to be a considerable village and is very pleasantly situated for a summer resort, enjoying great advantages for the navigation of the bay.

At about 1797 Jeremiah Petty built a Forge for making bar iron, on Peconic River at the Forge Pond, where he did business until his death, after which, in 1799, the property was purchased by Solomon Townsend of New York, who did business there for a while, and after his death and in 1818 the property was sold by his administrators to Bartholomew Collins, since which time but little business has been done with the large water power of the mill pond except as a reservoir for the mills below, and since 1870 the water has been drawn off during the summer for the purpose of cultivating cranberries on the bed of the pond. The same use is now being made of the pond above on the same stream by draining it and yet using the water of the river above by means of a canal.

The Upper Mills, so called, one mile above Riverhead village, on Peconic river, was the site of a grist mill, fulling mill and saw mill, all owned by Richard Albertson, the father and then the son, and built late in the past century.

In 1828 John Perkins became a proprietor in the water power and established a woollen factory, which has been continued ever since. It was ever regarded as very valuable to the people on both sides of the Island, and facilitates the transition from spinning and weaving cloth at home to carrying wool to the factory and taking manufactured cloth in return. The factory

was run during the life of Mr. Perkins, who died in 1866, and since his death by his sons, who are merchants in Riverhead. The present woollen factory was built by Mr Perkins in 1845.

LAW.

The first Court-house was built in Riverhead in 1728. The Court was first held on the last Tuesday in September, 1728.

An order was entered that all process should be returnable at the County Hall, and that is what it was called. Before that the Courts appear to have been held alternately in the towns of Southold and Southampton. The first term of the Common Pleas was held after the war on the last Tuesday of March, 1784. Ezra L'Hommedieu and Abraham Skinner were both then admitted to practice as attorneys and there appears on the records no other lawyer. Mr. L'Hommedieu was Clerk of the County, which office he held 26 years, during which time he was for one term a Member of Congress and many years a State Senator, besides having a very large practice as attorney, having over 80 writs returnable in the Common Pleas in one year.

Daniel Osborn, the father of the late Hull Osborn and of Dr. Thomas Osborn, was a member of the bar and a Member of Assembly in 1787; he died in 1801. Hull Osborn was a practicing lawyer in Riverhead for many years until 1817, and was for one year Clerk of the county in 1810. He died in 1834, very highly respected as a man and a lawyer.

The other practicing lawyers in early times were George Smith of Smithtown—he moved to Connecticut—Jos Strong of Orange county, who moved into this county and practiced law a number of years, and Silas Wood of Huntington. Eliphalet Wicks of Jamaica, a man of high standing, practiced law in the county many years. These are all the members of the bar who had ceased to practice in the county before 1825. The following are the lawyers that were practicing in Suffolk county when the writer came to the bar in 1825: Abraham Skinner, Chas. A. Floyd, Selah B. Strong, William P. Buffett, Abraham T. Rose, Hugh Halsey and Daniel

Robert. All these, together with every officer who then attended Court, have passed away except Mr. Robert, who is still living in New Utrecht. His office was in New York, but he attended all our courts and was one of the leading advocates until 1831.

The first Judges were Selah Strong, the elder, Abraham Woodhull, Thomas S. Strong, Joshua Smith, Jonathan Conklin, Hugh Halsey, Abraham T. Rose, William P. Buffett, J. Lawrence Smith, George Miller, Henry P. Hedges and John R. Reid. The last four are still living.

The following persons have been Members of Assembly from this town: Capt. John Wells, Usher H. Moore, who was also a member of the Constitutional Convention in 1821; Capt. Noah Youngs, John Terry, David Warner, George Howell, John C. Davis, James H. Tuthill, John S. Marcy and Nathan D. Petty. The three last have been members for two sessions each.

The first Clerk's office was built in 1846. The new Court-house was built in 1856. In 1875 the first Clerk's office was sold and a new building erected for Clerk's and Surrogate's offices.

RELIGION.

At the time of the Revolution it is believed that the only places of worship in the town were at Lower Aquebogue, Upper Aquebogue and Wading River, the first Presbyterian and the other two Congregational. At Baiting Hollow a Congregational house of worship was erected in 1802 and built anew about 1839. In 1815 separate worship was set up by Swedenborgians and in 1839 a house of worship was erected by them. In Wading River the first house was built about 1750 and a new house was erected in 1837. In Lower Aquebogue the first house was built in 1734; it was repaired in 1830 and rebuilt in 1859. The church some years ago became Congregational. At Upper Aquebogue a house of worship was erected in the fore part of the last century. In 1797 a new church was built. In 1833 it was remodeled and rebuilt. A new church edifice was built in 1862. This society became in a measure the mother of two other

congregations. There was a separation of the congregation in 1829 and the seceders built a house two miles east of Riverhead. In 1834 this new congregation harmoniously divided, and one portion took the meeting-house and moved it to Northville; the other portion removed to Riverhead, receiving compensation for their interest in the building, and worshiped in the lower room of the Seminary building until 1841, when the present Congregational Church was built, which was enlarged in the year 1868.

The Methodist Society in Riverhead was organized in 1833 and their first meeting-house was built in 1834. Their present noble edifice was built in 1870.

The Swedenborgian Society was organized in 1839. Their house of worship was built in 1855. Before the erection of their church they occupied a comfortable room as a place of worship, which was also used as a school room.

The Episcopalians commenced stated worship in Riverhead in 1870, and in 1873 they erected a neat chapel.

The Free Methodists erected a meeting house in 1872.

The Roman Catholic Society held services for several years in the old Court-house and in a house on East street. In 1870 their present handsome church and parsonage were erected.

At Jamesport a building was erected in 1839 and has been occupied as a place of worship for the Methodist Society since and sometimes as a school house.

The village of Riverhead was in 1825 and always had been a part of the Congregational Society of Upper Aquebogue. Mr. Swezey, the minister, statedly preached in the Court house every other Sunday at 5 o'clock, or in the evening. The Methodist circuit rider statedly preached in the Court house every other Friday afternoon or evening, and was entertained at Dr. Osborn's. In March, 1827, a stated weekly prayer meeting was established and ever after maintained. In June following a Sunday School with nearly 100 scholars was established in the Court-house and kept up, except that it was not held in the winter.

In 1828 or 1829 meetings were held and

a sermon read in the Court-house at 11 o'clock on the Sabbath and kept up for several years. At some time afterwards meetings were held statedly in the Court-house on Sunday evening, at which the Congregational and Methodist ministers preached alternately. So the two societies grew up together as the population increased. We thought then and we think still that there was much more moral and religious influence for good exercised than if only one denomination had occupied the whole ground.

EDUCATION.

There have been great advances in the cause of education since the Revolution. During that war the Island was in possession of the British, and the people were great sufferers from their troops and from marauders (plunderers they used to be called), who came from New England, so that the opportunities for schools were small; and then came up a generation during the war whose education was very limited, and no considerable public provision was made for education until long after the war. In the early part of this century there were two schools taught by native teachers that were very commendable for those times, and many young men received an education there which well fitted them for active life. We allude to the schools kept at Upper and Lower Aquebogue, the former by Josiah Reeve, afterwards Sheriff of the county, and the latter by Judge David Warner. No special efforts for extra education were made until the Franklinville Academy was erected in the year 1832. That soon became a prosperous and efficient institution and many young men were educated there. It continued to flourish for many years and constituted a new era in education in this part of the county and drew many pupils from other towns.

The standard of female education on this branch of the Island was very low up to this time. Indeed it had been so throughout most parts of the county. When Dr. Beecher preached at East Hampton his wife taught quite a class of female scholars from different parts of the county. The influence of those scholars told very favorably upon the communities where they were afterwards located. With that ex-

ception we know of no schools in the county for the special education of females.

The opportunities of girls in the two academies of East Hampton and Huntington were in those days very secondary. Indeed academics afforded inferior opportunities for thorough education. They were generally taught by young men who had little primary education, but had devoted their efforts to the classics and mathematics sufficiently to pass through college, and during their progress to a profession taught academics and high schools, imparting chiefly such learning as they had acquired. Female education had been overlooked or neglected, and thorough primary instruction nearly as much so.

In view of this state of things Dr. Joshua Fanning and the writer undertook to organize a Female Seminary, and in the year 1834 we erected the present seminary building in the village of Riverhead. In the spring of 1835 the school was begun with good success. Its object was to give thorough instruction in all the primary branches of an English education, with Latin and Mathematics. The effect of the school was almost magical upon the community. The ideas of people in regard to female education were raised more than one hundred per cent. in a short time, and the difference in the estimate of people in regard to thorough primary education soon became great and told upon the academies of the county, and the examination day at the close of the terms were for years among the proudest days of Riverhead.*

At the beginning it was supposed that young ladies must be educated in exclusive schools, but this was after a while found to be a mistake with us, and it is now generally conceded that schools of both sexes can be best governed and instructed.

This seminary and nearly all other schools in Riverhead have been superseded by the Union School, established in 1871, which has been a great success. A school of this kind acts under the sanction of the law and is amenable to the judgment and

good sense of the whole community, and has advantages for discipline and good government which can never be enjoyed by a private school.

HEALTH.

Riverhead is believed to be remarkable for the healthfulness of its climate. There have been no prevailing climatic diseases in the village in 52 years. The make of the earth is such that there can be no stagnant water above or below ground, and water for use is drawn from pure white sand, which makes it perfect in quality, while it is as cool as persons in poor health should desire. Summer diseases, which at times prevail in almost every village, have never been prevalent here.

At the south of Riverhead there is a pitch pine barren seven miles in extent, over which the ocean breezes pass, often loaded at the start with fog and dampness, which are absorbed by the dry country over which they pass. Fogs are very common on the south side but rare at Riverhead. In the spring the aroma from the pine growth is often perceived in the southerly breeze by strangers. This dry pine country is probably little inferior to the pine barrens at the South, which are often sought by invalids. It undoubtedly has a favorable effect upon the health of the village. The same causes, we think, render Jamesport equal if not superior to any watering place on the north side of Peconic Bay.

It is easy to chronicle events but not always so easy to relate with accuracy the moral state of a people or community as it bears on past and present times. The state of things now and fifty years ago in regard to morals and good government is vastly different, and the question is have we advanced? Are there proportionally more happy families, and more children trained to knowledge, virtue and industry? The truth is, that if we would have advancement in the right direction we must go still further and higher. There must be great reforms in every department of the government, and the people must hold their servants to a responsibility not thought of heretofore.

There can be no doubt that there have been great changes in some of the moral and social relations of the people. In re-

* When this was read at our Centennial our neighbors were not entirely satisfied, and requested that it should appear that Miss Leonard of Massachusetts taught the Seminary in its first years, and afterwards as Mrs. Miller taught it at different times, in all twenty one years.

gard to intemperance the change is great. In 1828 the liquor drunk in the town was five times as much as it was two years afterwards. The first temperance meeting in Riverhead was held late in January, 1829, when 17 signed the pledge. At the next meeting a fortnight later the signers were doubled and the consumption of liquor was undoubtedly lessened one half in three months. Before that liquor was almost everywhere. Every merchant and man of business kept his open bottle. On every public occasion drunkards abounded. But as soon as the principles of total abstinence was adopted a change came over the community. At the very next town meeting the people all went home before night sober. At the next launching of Capt. Henry Horton's vessel no liquor was used. Fishermen abandoned it; merchants who sold other goods quit the sale of it. The people soon saw clearly, what fifty years has proved to be true, that even the moderate use of liquor is not necessary but hurtful, and that sound morals and good government require that its habitual use should be abandoned. It would be hard to estimate the amount of temporal blessings this great reformation in principle and practice has caused to households and individuals.

O if some of our temperance friends would only get the foolish crotchet out of their heads that no man is fit for any office if he will not at once vote for total prohibition, we might soon prove by the laws we have whether we are in a condition to have laws more efficient than the Local Option Act. If they would join in one party or the other the great body of honest voters of the State in the present struggle to elevate the standard of official duty and purify the poli-

tics of the country, they will find themselves standing on a much firmer basis for further assistance from the laws. Let us be sure, if possible, that men are honest and capable whom we support for office, but never let us reject such because they are not for prohibition where such a law is not in question.

Our advantages for education and the training of children are vastly greater than they were 40 or 50 years ago, but do we improve them as we should? Are children and boys just passing to manhood restrained as they should be? The foundation and corner stone of good government is that boys should never be suffered to run at large in the streets in the night time. Laxness in this matter is preparing children for the slaughter. Above all things, if possible, make your family a happy home for your children. In no point of view have I for 35 years looked upon the young ladies educated at our Seminary with so much interest as with the hope that they would acquire knowledge and training that would the better fit them to make their homes happy, with the more skill to control children and youth under their care. We look with great hope for the good influence of our Union school in this matter.

We could not well say less in regard to moral questions which have affected us so deeply in time past and must for time to come. We enter upon the second century of our national existence under very auspicious circumstances and in nothing so much as the feeling that has arisen among thoughtful and true men of all parties that the standard of morals in politics, and in the conducting of our National and State governments, must be greatly elevated.

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